

Moss: mm. 3600 wide format From pop-up tents to textile displays, with creativity, technique and magic

Born from the brilliant mind of Bill Moss, the American company now has five offices in three continents and boasts an unparalleled product offering

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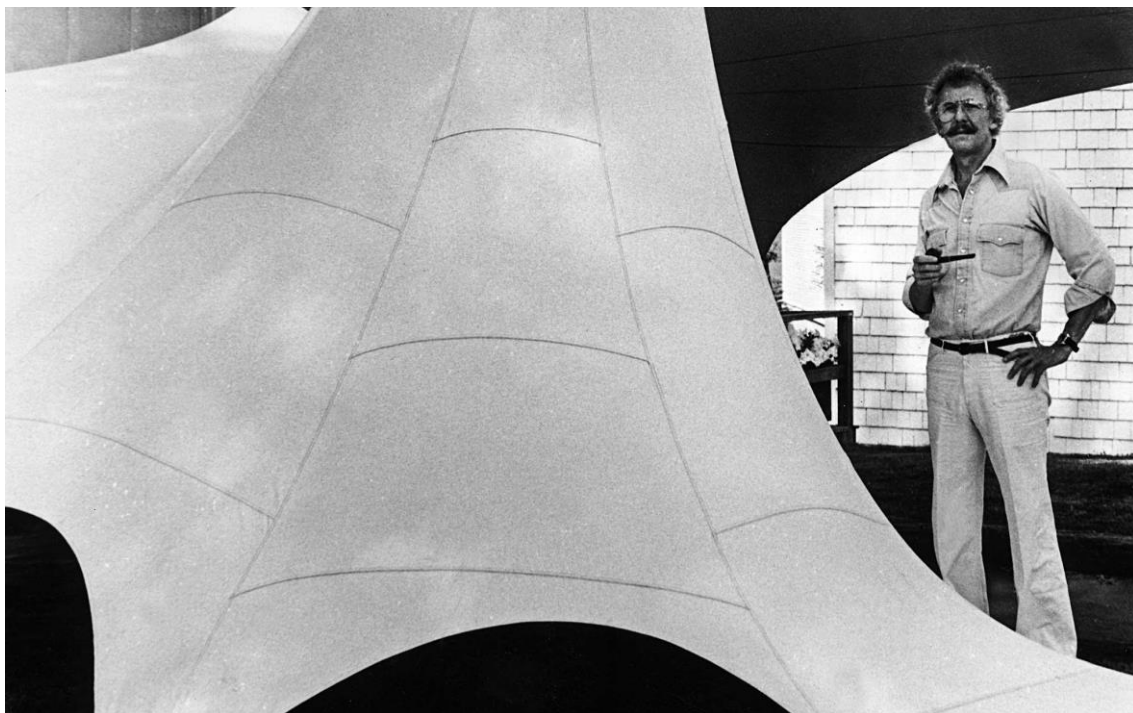


A portion of the immersive landscape "Carola's Garden," created by Moss for the artist, designer and architect Yadegar Asisi. The cylindrical structure has a height of 32 meters and a circumference of 110 meters.

"After 18 months of experimentation, Bill Moss and Henry Stribley [...] have developed a pop-up tent that folds up to the size of a knapsack, weighs so little that a child can carry it, opens up like an umbrella, needs no stakes or ropes and is ready to inhabit in four minutes flat." This was stated in Life's July 18, 1955, issue. The following morning, Moss and Stribley filed a patent application for a "folding portable shelter" that was granted in September 1960, confirming that the pop-up tent was their original invention.

Last June – driven by my usual and uncontrollable exploration frenzy – I visited the European operations and two (of the three) American facilities of Moss Inc, the company created by Bill Moss, which today is one of the world's most important producers of textile displays. As always, I should have interviewed some managers, toured the production areas, discovered the technologies used, etc. That's what I tried to do, but I admit that during the visits, I lost some of the lucidity required of a journalist, and I started to feel like Charlie in the Chocolate Factory. In the company I visited, in

fact, everything is extraordinary. The people who work there, the history, the internal organisation, the projects they carry out and the way they are carried out: nothing is familiar and predictable. In the end, the only normal thing I came across was the technologies used, although some of the choices made in this area are also exceptional.



Bill Moss poses next to the fabric structure he created in 1970 for the Center for Maine Contemporary Art (CMCA).

Once upon a time, there was a brilliant man

Bill Moss was born in Detroit (Michigan) in 1923. He studied art and began his career as an illustrator for Ford Times, a monthly general-interest magazine produced by Ford. Passionate about hunting, fishing and outdoor activities, in the mid-1950s, Moss began to design innovative camping tents that would solve all the well-known problems of classic tents, which had been the same for centuries. From then on, developing increasingly ambitious architectural structures from fabric became his only activity. The main characteristic of all his creations is the sinuosity, given precisely by the use of fabric or other soft materials. "I don't consciously borrow from nature. Sometimes I'll see my work later in a shell or spider web, and I take it as a compliment. Nature is the best engineer," he said.

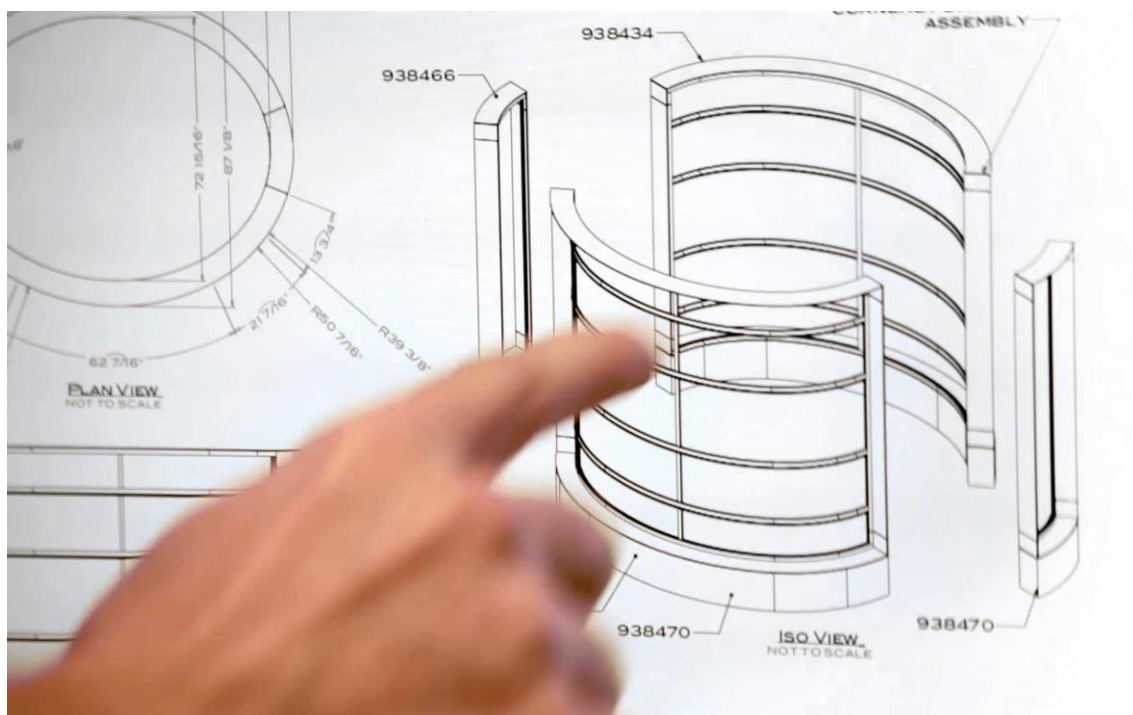


Structure designed by Florian Wieder and made by Moss for the MTV Video Music Awards 2010.

In 1975, Bill Moss founded the Moss Tent Works. To promote its activity, it exhibited in various fairs related to both tourism and outdoor sports. The Moss Tent Works booths were designed and built by Moss and his team using the same materials as the tents so that they can be transported easily and assembled quickly. Many people recognized the beauty, originality and practicality of the stands designed by Moss, and the company began to receive requests for this type of product.

For Moss, the '80s were the years of his consecration: his Parawing Tent (a tent of almost 500 m²) was widely used for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics; some of his creations were exhibited in various museums in the United States; his Star Gazer II tent became part of MoMA's permanent collection; and several famous architects wanted his tents in their projects.

At the same time, Moss Inc, a new company founded by Moss to respond to the demand for exhibition stands and temporary installations for events, developed its business.



One of Moss' strengths is its team of technical designers who support the company's customers in the creative development of their projects and transform their most extreme demands into feasible structures and products.

1994-2009: 25 years of growth and expansion

Bill Moss died in 1994. Moss Inc, which remained in the hands of Bill's ex-wife Marilyn Moss, soon moved to a larger location, increased its workforce and acquired new technologies, including a large-format inkjet printer. The market, at first sceptical, began to welcome the company's creations with ever greater favour. Moss Inc grew and acquired more and more important customers, also thanks to the activity of a sales office opened in Germany by the end of the '80s.



The print room of the Moss site in Lennestadt (Germany), with Durst 1.6, 3.2 and 5-metre printers that feature either UV-curable or sublimation inks.

In 2000, Marylin Moss sold the company to private equity. For Moss Inc, a phase of growth through acquisitions begins, establishing it as a global player with three production sites in the United States, one in Germany and one in China. In addition, these acquisitions enabled the company to expand its product offering and increase its overall production capacity, as well as to interact with more demanding customers on unique and highly complex projects.



The two Monti Antonio calenders installed at the Moss site in Lennestadt (Germany).

Displays inspired by art, architecture and design

Although it's been a few years since Moss was a small business, led by its eclectic founder, the company continues to have a creative approach to the projects it develops. "Print is not enough for our customers, even if it has quality and size never seen before. They ask us for three-dimensional structures and unique solutions created specifically for them. That's what we like to do and what we do best," explains Heidi Katherine, SVP Global Design and Development at Moss Inc. The company, in fact, has organized its production sites so that the complexity of creating customized and highly processed products is reduced to a minimum. "We've standardized the way we do custom projects. So, even if each project is a separate one, we can complete it quickly and cost-effectively, avoiding waste and error," Katherine continues. But some of Moss' recent projects are so complex that it is difficult to even guess their genesis and the techniques used for their realization. I'm referring, for example, to the interior design of LinkedIn's headquarters in San Francisco or McDonald's in Chicago. "Our team is made up of people with extremely diverse skills. For some of our processes, we use 3D design software and state-of-the-art digital machinery. For others, however, the entire production process is manual. For the former we use experienced technicians, for the latter a team of artists," explains Victoria Weidner, Plant Manager of Moss Inc. "The difficulty increases when a customer asks us for hundreds of pieces of a product that can only be made manually. One of our strengths is our ability to handle requests like this." Despite the painstaking organization and extraordinary skills, the project completed for LinkedIn took a year's work. "When we started discussing the project, the building was not yet finished and the installations we were supposed to make were illustrated in some drawings with very little technical detail," Katherine continues. "We had to find the right materials to make what the designers had imagined come true. Then we had to find a way to work with them." The result is breath-taking.



To cut fabric, Moss mainly uses 3.2-metre-wide Zünd cutting tables, configured with a conveyor belt, unwinder, and rotary knife tool.

In addition to setting up exhibition booths and company headquarters, with techniques and solutions at the limits of the imagination, Moss also deals with sets for events (sports, music, etc.) and special projects. For example, it is a partner of the architect Yadegar Asisi for the printing of his 360° panoramas: huge cylindrical structures (32 m high and 110 m circumferential) that offer visitors an unprecedented immersive visual experience.

Five locations, one production philosophy

Moss has almost 400 employees and carries out about 20,000 projects a year. Because it must combine the creation of customized projects with the ability to produce them in a short time, the company has technical designers, prepress specialists and project managers. To simplify production management and customer relations, Moss has also developed proprietary software accessible via a web browser. Thanks to it, customers can send orders for standard products in total autonomy or manage the preliminary phases of more complex processes (approval of structural projects proposed by Moss, upload of graphics, etc.). Production-ready jobs then flow automatically through the various departments (printing, cutting, sewing, logistics). Speaking of machines, Moss' flagships include eight 3.2m Durst Rhotex 325s, combined with Monti Antonio calenders. "With offices in several countries, one of the highest production capacities in the world and effective logistics, we can manage the production and shipping of materials to hundreds of stores for large brand owners," explains Peter Bottenberg, Managing Director of Moss GmbH. "In such a scenario, however, it is essential to offer customers consistent and certain results. For this reason, we have been working for years to standardise the printing technologies, software and materials used in all our plants. In order to get the most out of our Rhotex, the fabrics we use most frequently are the result of the research work of our materials specialists and are produced exclusively for us by one of our partners." But Moss' focus on quality doesn't stop there. "On every job we do, we keep samples for three years. So, if a customer asks us for a reprint, or commissions a new job for the same brand, we'd have a colour reference to follow," explains John Cooper, Plant Manager at Moss Inc. "These samples also come in handy when we update our presses. At any time, we can verify that the colour result obtained with the new machines is identical to that obtained with the old ones."



One of the more than 100 sewing machines distributed in the five Moss production sites.

Endless possibilities

Heidi Katherine, before joining the Moss team, worked for one of its clients. At the time, she loved talking to Moss because she was constantly being stimulated to explore new possibilities. Today, Katherine works every day to ensure that Moss remains the ideal partner for customers seeking extraordinary solutions. "We work closely with our suppliers to have access, before anyone else, to new products available on the market," she explains. "And as far as already known materials are concerned, we are experimenting, trying to find out how to use them in an unusual way. Finally, our designers are constantly working on the design and improvement of our aluminium structures, as well as their assembly and disassembly mechanisms. In fact, Moss holds 15 patents."



A team of workers from the company installs a large lightbox.

Fabric is beautiful, and supports eco-sustainability

Moss has chosen to give ample space to fabric in its product line in part because the quality it obtains by printing on this material with sublimation inks is superior to that achieved with any other material and printing technology. "Many of our UV-curable machines are configured with Orange and Violet colours. Yet the gamut we get from sublimation printing is always higher. Furthermore, brand owners appreciate the brilliance of this type of printing, as well as the opacity of the fabric in general," explains Christos Pappas, R&D and Print Production Manager at Moss GmbH.



Many of Moss' products are the result of the work of artists, who use manual techniques and an unbelievable variety of materials.

Also, the fabric is eco-sustainable, and this is a very important aspect for Moss. In fact, not only is eco-sustainability a key value of the company, but it is also an object of great interest to its customers. And if the most important brand owners only ask for green products for their stores, Moss responds by allowing them to collect and recycle outdated communication materials. It's an option that Levi's has already chosen for some pilot stores.



An interior of the fast food chain Popeyes, which for years has commissioned Moss to set up the interiors of its restaurants.

An example of doing well

In Moss, there are no discordant notes — or, if there are, it is very difficult to hear them. In every area, the company is committed to following the best possible path. Whether it's customer relations, investment in human resources, technological choices, development of new products or respect for the environment, Moss identifies the best way forward and does it. It is not easy: it takes determination, commitment, economic resources and much more. But it is encouraging to see how the company's effort to do well pays off with goodwill on the part of customers, who have continued to choose Moss for decades as a partner for incredibly beautiful and incredibly complicated projects.



The print room of the Moss headquarters in Elk Grove Village, with two 3.2 m Durst Rhotex 325s.

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Quote 1

"At the Lennestadt site, we digitally print around 1.4 million square metres of fabric per year — we are second in Europe" - Peter Bottenberg, Managing Director of Moss GmbH

Quote 2

"We only print on transfer paper. This way, we achieve higher quality and more intense colours on all types of fabrics" - Christos Pappas, R&D and Print Production Manager at Moss GmbH

Quote 3

"In the company, we all have tablets and smartphones available to update in real-time the status of the orders we are dealing with" - John Cooper, Plant Manager of Moss Inc

Quote 4

"We carry out, with standard and repeatable modes, projects in which there is little or nothing standard: everything is personalized" - Heidi Katherine, SVP Global Design and Development of Moss Inc